



# How Northwest Region states are supporting schools in need of improvement



## Summary



Institute of Education Sciences

U.S. Department of Education



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**August 2007**

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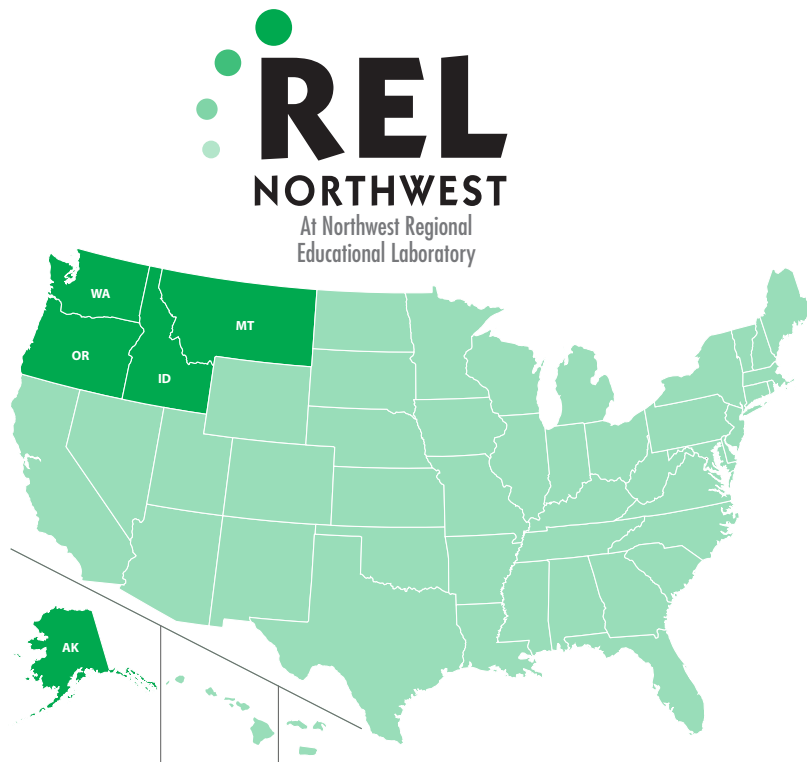
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August 2007

This report was prepared for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under Contract ED-06-CO-0016 by Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest administered by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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Davis, D., Krasnoff, B., Moilanen, C., Sather, S., & Kushman, J. (2007). *How Northwest Region states are supporting schools in need of improvement* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2007–No. 009). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

This report is available on the regional educational laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

## Summary

# How Northwest Region states are supporting schools in need of improvement

**This descriptive study examines the systems of technical assistance and support that Northwest Region states implemented during 2005/06 for schools in need of improvement. It does not evaluate states' efforts or effectiveness. By illuminating key characteristics and differences among state systems, the intent is to stimulate a thoughtful analysis of what states can do and what issues they might address to move schools out of in need of improvement status.**

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act challenged states to accelerate student academic achievement so that 100 percent of public school students are proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014. Building on the requirements of the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act, No Child Left Behind requires states to create an accountability system that tracks progress toward all students' proficiency in math and reading. To increase accountability, schools are required to make adequate yearly progress by meeting state-established proficiency levels set to rise incrementally to 100 percent by 2014.

Districts identify schools as in need of improvement if they fail to make adequate yearly progress on the state assessment for two or more consecutive years. A school ceases to be identified as in need of improvement when

it makes adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years. Districts are responsible for ensuring that schools in need of improvement under their jurisdiction receive technical assistance, and they have primary responsibility for supporting several requirements. States have overarching responsibility to ensure that schools receive the needed support to make adequate yearly progress.

Northwest Region states may be able to learn from implementation of No Child Left Behind's provisions for schools in need of improvement in the other states in the region, taking into account their unique contexts.

Evaluation reports from the first two years of Washington's School Improvement Assistance Program and follow-up interviews with principals in participating schools indicate that school improvement facilitators—retired or former administrators who come from outside the district and work at the school site to guide and support the staff in developing and implementing a school improvement plan over three years—reportedly had a positive effect on Washington's initial cohorts. Efforts in Montana and Oregon also point to early positive effects of assisting schools by employing external facilitators such as school support teams and distinguished educators—that is, teachers or principals who are knowledgeable

about research-based programs and instructional practices and may have experience with Title IA schoolwide projects, school reform, and methods for improving educational opportunities for low-performing students.

Washington's School Improvement Assistance Program requires the majority of faculty to participate in the program and makes specific suggestions for building "readiness," such as developing a schoolwide vision and teaching staff processes for productive meetings and reaching consensus. Washington's principals in School Improvement Assistance Program evaluations noted a more productive working relationship with the school when the school improvement facilitator's experience, expertise, and leadership style were aligned with the school's needs and context.

All Northwest Region states cited professional development as an important element of their statewide systems of support. Northwest Region states are convening school staff for conferences such as Alaska's annual No Child Left Behind Conference and Montana's High Priority Schools Institutes. Additionally, staff in schools throughout the states engage in school- or district-based professional development geared to their school improvement efforts.

Many schools require some level of continued assistance beyond the initial intensive support they receive from their districts or the state. In Washington the support lasts three years, but it often takes longer to turn a school around, according to respondents. As one Washington principal observed, "Don't leave us just when we get it. The support from the state should continue so that we can trust in the process and continue it."

As states and districts provide support for schools facing increasingly stringent No Child Left Behind requirements, common strategies are emerging, such as providing professional development for principals and assigning external facilitators such as distinguished educators or school support teams to provide consistent support. However, such challenges as large percentages of rural and remote schools, high numbers of non-English-speaking and special education students, and local control issues all preclude the emergence of one overarching best solution. At this time a better understanding of the critical success factors and conditions that optimize the improvement process is needed to assist policymakers as they develop their statewide systems of support.

**August 2007**